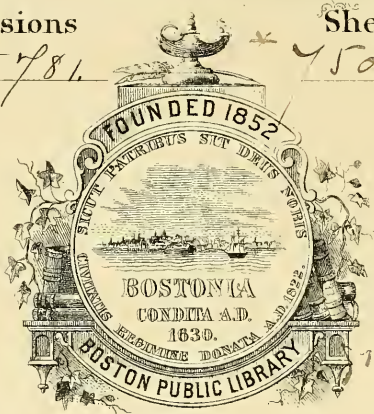


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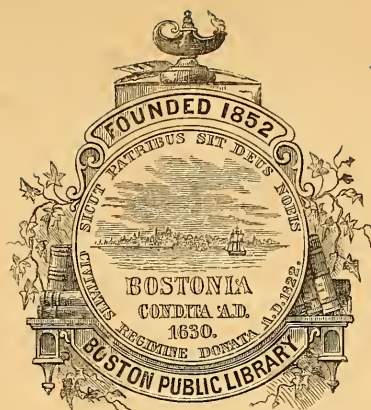
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CHURCH POLITY;

OR,

WHAT IS AN

APOSTOLIC CHURCH?

A

SEMI-CENTENNIAL DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED MAY 12, 1875, BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND BAPTIST STATE
CONVENTION,

BY REV. N. M. WILLIAMS, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH, WICKFORD.

PROVIDENCE :

J. A. & R. A. REID, PRINTERS.

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CHURCH POLITY.

THE nineteenth century presents to the world the spectacle of church government in three forms. Borrowing from the vocabulary of the state, we may call them the monarchical, the aristocratic, and the democratic or republican. The Episcopal form of government is monarchical, specimens of which may be seen in the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Church, the Church of England, and modified by union with an aristocratic element, in the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States and the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Presbyterian form of government is aristocratic, softened by some infusion of the popular element. The popular form is represented in the Congregationalists, the Wesleyan Methodists, and the Baptists—most thoroughly by the Baptists. These existing forms of church government is what we mean by the church polity of the nineteenth century. New Testament church polity covers only the apostolic period, and by this the church polity of the nineteenth century, and of all the intervening centuries, must be tried. What I propose to do, then, is this: to break whatever connection may be alleged to exist between the church polity of the present and the church polity of the apostolic age, and thus avoid transferring to the first century what we see in the nineteenth.

To this method there ought to be no objection. The plan of working back from century to century till we arrive at

the first is almost sure to result badly, for it is well-nigh impossible to consider the subject of church polity in that way without taking back with us a burden of prejudice. Had the history of Christianity, in its true organic form, ever been written, the case would be different; but with all the advance which has been made in this branch of learning within the present century, Christianity, in its true organic form, is still waiting for a historian. History, both ecclesiastical and secular, has been colored by the influence of mental characteristics, education and creed. The historian has become advocate before finishing his first chapter. Whether history has drawn the portrait of William Penn correctly, turns—in the judgment of some—on the question whether his name was spelled with one *n* or two. That Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" bears marks of infidelity has been generally conceded, yet a Christian scholar of our own country has recently given to the public an elaborate argument on the other side. Historical criticism must be yet more searchingly applied before a still better history of Christianity, both spiritual and organic, can be written. The "Apostolic Constitutions," the "Epistles of Ignatius," the "History of Eusebius," and the "Decretals," are not the only witnesses which should be severely cross-questioned. In the meantime we ought to be grateful that we have the means of determining what was the church polity of apostolic times. We need no help even from the fathers, though, after answering the question in the way proposed, we are at liberty to inquire whether the fathers are in harmony with the New Testament.

I.

OF WHOM WAS THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, OR A CHRISTIAN CHURCH, COMPOSED ?

It is remarkable that the Greek word, ἐκκλησία, represented in our English Scriptures by the word *church*,

was used by our Lord upon only two occasions. It was used when Peter, speaking for all the apostles, made his celebrated confession. "Thou art Peter," said Jesus, "and upon this rock I will build my church." The word was used in Athens to denote one of those assemblies of the people answering to the Roman *comitia*, in which "acts of the senate were canvassed, laws were proposed and approved or rejected, magistrates were appointed, war declared, and the like."* So far as I know, the Athenians never applied the singular to a group of assemblies. In speaking of more than one they would have used the plural. But in what sense does our Lord use the singular? Does he group all the local churches of the world together, and call them "my church," in the sense of one great organic body? But it would be conceded that at the most there was then only one local church on the earth; and the New Testament does not appear to authorize the statement that there was even one. Baptists have generally affirmed, that the first Christian church was formed in the beginning of the Lord's ministry, but if we rise above dogmatic considerations, and hold the question, as we certainly ought to hold it, as one of mere interpretation, we shall find it impossible to maintain the position. The germ of the first church may be seen in the calling of Andrew and John, and that germ was continually unfolding through the Saviour's ministry, but the full blossom did not appear till the sun burst forth with Pentecostal heat. While the word ἐκκλησία (church) occurs only twice in Matthew, it does not occur even once in either of the other gospels. It would have been contrary to fact to say: "On this rock I will build my churches, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them;" for many true churches become extinct. If it be affirmed that all true believers, hundreds of millions, dwelling in the most widely separated regions of the earth, bound together as one visible

* J. J. Eschenburg's Manual.

organization,—if it be affirmed that this is what Christ meant, it may be denied and the reasons be given, first, that the existence of such a body is recognized in no other place in the New Testament, and, secondly, that no such body has ever existed in fact ; for the Papal Church, and the Protestant Episcopal Church, are but rival dwarfs of their favorite ideal, “The Holy Catholic Church.” All believers, not all believers organized into one visible body, is evidently what our Lord meant, and this is the sense in which the word *church* is used in a few other places.

The only remaining passage in which the word is used in the gospels is Matt. 18 : 17 :—“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church ; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” That here the word denotes such a company of persons as could assemble in one place, is so generally admitted that no argument in support of the view is needed. Four authorities may be cited as examples of many. Meyer (Lutheran) :—“Here the word means a single congregation, and may be larger or smaller according to place and circumstances.” Owen (Presbyterian) :—“A congregation of believers, which at first was only one, but as Christianity spread from one country to another, became numerous and local. The use of the article denotes the particular church to which the parties belonged.” Trench (Episcopalian) :—“A single body of believers, united in one another and in Christ, and they forming a community by themselves, with all the privileges, ordinances, and means of grace essential to salvation,” and this meaning is approved by Dr. Nast (Episcopal Methodist).

Let it now be observed how often in the Acts and the Epistles the term *church* denotes a body of believers dwelling in one city. There is one case of apparent exception, though even that does not appear in our English Scriptures. To this your special attention is called, be-

cause in nearly all the English and American non-episcopal books on church polity with which I am acquainted, the passage is regarded as a strong proof-text against the Episcopal conception of a catholic church. Acts 9:31 is the passage, and it reads thus:—"Then had the *churches* rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria." But the reading which is preferred by the highest critical authorities is ἐκκλησία (church):—"Then had the *church* rest." Even Bengel, as long ago as 1742, preferred the singular, and that reading has since been confirmed. The plural must certainly give way to the singular. The passage is lost to independency, but it is not gained to episcopacy, for when the historian says that the *church* had rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, he is evidently thinking chiefly concerning the believers of whom the church formed in Jerusalem was composed; for, except the apostles, that church had been scattered by persecution through those very districts. The churches which were soon formed there had never been subjected to persecution, so that it would have been superfluous to say that they had rest from persecution. Let it be further borne in mind that through the preaching of the persecuted Christians of Jerusalem, many had been converted to the faith in Phenice, Antioch, and Cyprus, who were of course incorporated as churches. But not one of these churches is included in Luke's report concerning the church which had rest. Besides the church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, there were *churches* in Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch. It follows that even with the true reading (church), the passage yields no support to the idea of one visible, organized church, consisting of all local churches.

We return, then, to the thought that often, in the Acts of the Epistles, the term *church* denotes a body of believers dwelling in one place. As Dr. Dexter, in his excellent work upon Congregationalism, says: "In more

than sixty instances this word is used in the New Testament under circumstances which naturally imply a single congregation of believers," and "as many as thirty-five different churches are directly or indirectly referred to by name in the New Testament." We read, for example, of the church in Smyrna, the church in Ephesus, the church in Pergamos, the church in Sardis, of the churches in Galatia, and we even read of the church in the house of Philemon and of the church in the house of Nymphas. But do not Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Methodists have their local churches? Do we not hear of St. Stephen's church, in Providence, of St. Paul's, in Boston, and St. Ignatius', in New York? Yet, do not Episcopalians speak of the one Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, and the Methodists of the one Methodist Episcopal Church? But, while the inspired writers speak of local churches, do they also speak of the Church of Palestine, of the Church of Asia Minor, of the Church of Macedonia? Emphatically it may be asked if they speak of any such unit as the Church of the Roman Empire. Thus it is that Baptists justify their rejection of the phrase, "The Baptist Church of the United States," and recognize only Baptist churches.

How, then, has it happened that the idea of organic church unity has taken possession of so large a part of the Christian world? How is it that such great bodies as the Papal Church, and the Greek Church, and the Lutheran Church, and the Reformed Church, and the Episcopal Church and the Methodist Church have come into being? Of this we may be certain, that the difference between such complex forms of government and the simple form reported in the New Testament is so great, that the change could no more have been effected at once than the Pyramids could have sprung into being in a day. The people should be taught when this morbid secretion of organic church unity began to appear. A

little more than two hundred years after the death of Christ, a man was converted to Christianity by the name of Cyprian. He became Bishop of the Church of Carthage, North Africa. Pious, learned and able, he yet fell into the current unscriptural views relative to church government. He conceived the unity of "The Church," as the phrase had already come to be, as external. It was difficult for Cyprian to see how a particular church could be a church of Christ unless it should acknowledge itself as connected with one great body—the Church. Churches which declined such incorporation were branded as a sect. Members of such churches were heretics. But *calling* a given body the church did not give it the unity for which Cyprian pleaded. How was that unity to be secured? The popular form of government which everywhere prevailed in the age of the apostles had already received a deadly blow. Men wanted to be bishops, and bishops became plenty. But, as children become dissatisfied with a much coveted plaything after it has been used awhile, so bishops wanted something new. Metropolitan bishoprics arose. Vanity was gratified. Ambition grew fat. Cyprian's idea of organic unity was therefore not so very difficult to be realized. Christ—so Cyprian taught—gave permanent supremacy to Peter. Peter, then, was held to be the representative of unity, and, though writing not long after the middle of the third century, Cyprian went so far as to teach that Rome was Peter's seat, though he sometimes opposed the demands of the Roman bishop. How this infant monstrosity of organic church unity, begotten by a Carthaginian bishop, grew, and how it grew in insolence and tyranny, is well-known. Even if the papacy had expired under the blows of the reformers the system of outward church unity would have survived, for Luther saw not the apostolic model of a Christian church. So the Reformation needed to be immediately reformed, and never has it ceased to need it. So far as respects church organization, Protest-

antism is a failure. God, therefore, brings forward into greater prominence another people that he may show how Christianity can flourish without the organic unification of churches and the centralization of power.

This, then, is the first answer which the first question of the discourse must receive, that a church was composed of as many persons as could conveniently assemble for the worship of God.

The second answer is, that a church was composed of only those who professed to have become disciples of Christ. Before proving this by the infallible word, let me remind you that a church might consist of men, women and children, received without condition. The members might believe something or nothing, might be regenerate or unregenerate, moral or immoral ; the mere fact of their humanity would be the basis of their membership. 'By this plan all the inhabitants of the earth ought to be brought into the churches as soon as possible. Thus the church and the world would be one and the same. Distinction between tares and wheat would be impossible ; they all might be tares. Distinction between sheep and goats would be impossible ; they all might be goats. Distinction between good fish and bad fish would be impossible ; they all might be bad fish. Should there be some wheat, some good fish, some sheep, it would be in spite of the plan, not because the plan required it. Dr. Bellows has recently said on behalf of the Unitarians :—" We can and do admit all manner of men into our society ; Spiritualists, Catholics, Atheists, Infidels,—all are equally welcome."

Instead of such an indiscriminate sweep into the church net, let it be supposed that only those may become members who have been baptized, the baptism being administered as soon as possible after natural birth. Upon the supposition that the use of water would be attended by the regeneration of the infant, we should then be sure of having churches between which and the

world would be a sharp distinction. But what is the voice of history? This plan has been tried. Though at first opposed, it was more widely adopted, till, in the course of a few hundred years, it became the common practice over all Europe, to baptize human beings when they were too young to know what was done or why it was done. These infants were supposed to be regenerated in baptism. Such persons were brought into "The Church" with no act of their own, with no knowledge of their own. Thus it is scarcely an overestimate to say that almost all Europe, almost all Western Asia, and much of North Africa, became incorporated into "The Church." But when the baptized infants became adults did they fulfill the theory that they were regenerated in baptism? The great mass of church members gave painful evidence of profound self-deception, or, in the words of Neander, of "indescribable hypocrisy." The world had been baptized into "The Church," and so "The Church" had become the world. It would be difficult to prove that there were as many regenerate men in "The Church" as there were out of it. Many of the clergy, as ministers came at length to be called, were so much given to gambling with dice, that one of the bishops caused the dice to be inscribed with names of Christian virtues.* It was thought that that would sanctify the gaming.

But it is conceivable that membership in Christian churches might be still more restricted. It would be possible to receive only such persons as had arrived at a sufficient age to choose for themselves; that is, such persons as were old enough to repent and believe, baptism being administered, not as a means of securing grace, but as an expression of grace already received; administered, therefore, after repentance and faith—not before. This plan would, of course, exclude from membership all infants. It would imply that profession of religion is a

* Neander.

voluntary act. The second plan would imply that it may be involuntary, which is a contradiction in terms—an involuntary profession of religion is an impossible conception.

The question before us, then, is this: *Which of these different forms of church membership is approved by Christ and the apostles?* The true answer can be obtained only by an appeal to that part of the Bible which speaks of Christian churches. We shall find not one word concerning Christian churches in Exodus or Leviticus, or any other part of the Old Testament. The Old Testament says much concerning the Jewish nation, and considerable in regard to a rite called circumcision, but it says nothing whatever relative to Christian churches. Begin, then, at the first verse of Matthew and read on till you come to the last verse of the Revelation, for the purpose of transcribing into a blank book every verse from which even the inference could be drawn that any person should be received into a Christian church, except upon his own voluntary profession of faith in Jesus Christ, and the blank book will be as white as when it was bought. You will have found not one example of infant church membership. Not one precept concerning it. Conscious, voluntary agents, not infants, were added to the apostolic churches, and only those conscious agents were added who professed to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit; nay, not all those even, but only those who believed and were baptized. “They that gladly received his word were baptized. * * * And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved,”—more correctly: “And the Lord added to the church the saved ones.” In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul addresses the members as saints, as believers, as brethren, as God’s children, as servants of righteousness. He addresses the members of the church in Corinth also as saints, the members of the church in Ephesus as saints, of the church in Philippi and of the church in Colosse as saints. There is not an epistle in the New Testament which does not imply

throughout that the persons addressed had all been received into churches with the understanding that they were conscious partakers of divine life through Christ, and there is no intimation that these persons had belonged to the churches in some lower sense before they belonged to it in a higher sense; as, for example, that they became half-members by natural birth or by baptism in infancy, and that they became members in full at the age of fourteen or more, by merely recognizing the promises which either their parents or persons called by that oddest of all combinations, *God-father and God-mother*, made on their behalf. Membership in an apostolic church was membership in full from the moment of baptism.

Notice, also, that members of apostolic churches might be excluded. Exclusion was expressly commanded by our Lord himself. Instances of exclusion are reported in the Acts; many and urgent commands to exclude are contained in the Epistles and the Revelation; but in nearly all cases, perhaps in all, exclusion implied that the persons excluded must be presumed never to have been regenerated. It follows that only the renewed were regarded as qualified for church membership. The church polity which denies the obligation to exclude is one of the deplorable results of indiscriminate church membership. If the unregenerate may become members of a church, why exclude? Hence, to-day prevails through a large part of the Christian world the polity, *once in never out*, whatever the character, whatever the doctrine. "Who ever heard," inquires Dr. Hawks, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, "of the excommunication of a layman from our branch of the apostolic church? Neither the General Convention nor any State Convention have" [has?] "ever provided any 'rule or process' for excommunication. There is not a clergyman in the church who—if he were desirous to excommunicate an offender—would know how to take the first step in the process. * * * Shall * * * the presbyter alone do it, or

shall it be done by his bishop, or by a conclave of bishops, or of bishops and presbyters, or by a State Convention—including the laity, or by the General Convention—including the laity again? No man can answer it, for there is no rule on the subject.”* Is it surprising that a church which never excludes should so freely welcome persons who have been, or ought to be, excluded from other churches? Is it not natural that persons whose sense of Christian obligation is feeble should seek the sheltering freedom of such a church? In the Papal Church heresy and disregard of ritual requirements exclude; badness of character does not. Rid the Christian world of the evil of indiscriminate church membership and the necessity of exclusion would be greatly reduced, while exclusion, when necessary, would be more faithfully employed.

But how many are still far from seeing the evil of mixed membership, or, if they see it, from admitting and condemning it! The late Roman Catholic Archbishop Spalding, of Baltimore, says † that the church founded by Christ has always proclaimed the truth, that by baptism all mankind become equally children of God. The Presbyterian Book of Government says ‡:—“A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their offspring.” If Presbyterianism rejects the dogma of baptismal regeneration, it follows that the meaning of these words is, that a church consists of regenerate and unregenerate persons. If it denies that unregenerate persons may be members of a church, it follows according to the Presbyterian creed that the infants of professing Christians are regenerated. “The apostles,” says § Dr. Philip Schaff (Lutheran) “never demanded full and formal regeneration before

* Coleman's Manual on Prelacy and Ritualism, p. 122.

† Miscellanea; Influence of Catholicity on Civil Liberty, p. 133.

‡ Book I. Chap. 2, 4.

§ History of the Apostolic Church, p. 574. Id. p. 638.

baptism, but simply an honest longing for salvation in Christ ;” and he insists that justifying faith is wrought by the Holy Ghost in the church through the word and sacraments.” Dr. William Adams, Professor of Systematic Divinity in an Episcopal Theological Seminary in Wisconsin, in a recent elaborate treatise on Baptismal Regeneration, indirectly teaches, indeed, like many other Episcopalians, that “The Church” should consist of regenerate persons. He holds that “the mass of Christians in the New World do not as yet comprehend the nature of the church as a divine organization ; Episcopalians have the true conception. Let us see, then, what the true conception is. Regeneration, according to our author, and, as he certainly proves, according to the Prayer Book, also, is conveyed in and by means of baptism. Regeneration in a revival, in one’s home, in a grove, upon the highway, without baptism, is almost ridiculed. The Episcopal Church, or, as he generally expresses it, “The Church,” teaches that both infants and adults receive a “new life,” are made “living members of the Church,” are “released from sin,” are “sanctified by the Holy Ghost,” are made “children of God,” are “born again,” “regenerated,” “at the moment” of baptism. Baptism conveys grace ; introduces into the church ; unites with the mystical body of Christ. All this is accomplished for millions of unconscious infants. When each of these infants has become an adult, the question, When did you become a Christian ? must of course receive for its answer : — “When I was baptized ;” and if the question is asked, “But you entertain the conviction that you have been regenerated since you emerged from the unconsciousness of infancy, and have had, therefore, some consciousness similar to that which is reported of the three thousand sinners, who, on the day of Pentecost, convicted of guilt, cried for pardon ?—if this question is asked, the answer must of course be :—“No ; I am a stranger to any such later change ; I was made a Christian in infancy by

baptism.” A relative of mine who, during many years, was accustomed to attend a Baptist meeting, and there to hear from one of our most faithful and discreet ministers such views of regeneration as are commonly preached in the Baptist pulpit, became in middle life an attendant upon an Episcopal meeting. She at length became painfully conscious of sin, and to this succeeded peaceful reliance upon the Saviour. Becoming cognizant of the spiritual process through which she had passed, the rector requested her to communicate the facts to certain members of the church, who were soon to meet for some social or charitable purpose; he was persuaded that the narrative might be the means of good.* It was done, and at the conclusion of the interview, the ladies gathered around her to say that they were deeply interested in her narrative, but were strangers to the feelings which she had revealed. These ladies, I think, with scarcely an exception, were baptized in infancy, and grew up with the conviction that that made them Christians. With the utmost respect for the conscientious convictions of those who live under such a system, I must yet be permitted to say, nearly in the language of Dr. Adams himself, that according to our understanding of the word of God, “the mass” of those who accept such a system “do not, as yet, comprehend the nature of a Christian church as a divine organization.” We are the more fearful of the effects of such a doctrine as that of baptismal regeneration when we are compelled to read in such a work as I have adverted to, that regeneration “demands, as prerequisites, *sincere repentance* from past sins and a *living faith*.” A teacher of systematic divinity affirming that, in order to be regenerated, a man must first have “*sincere repentance* and a *living faith*!” That one should need regeneration after one has had sincere

* It should be borne in mind that Episcopal churches have no meetings for the purpose of listening to a narrative of religious experience, so called. They have not the privilege of voting upon the admission of persons who desire to become members, and have lost the right of excluding the unworthy. These powers have been assumed by the “clergy.”

repentance and a living faith is a curiosity in theological teaching not to be often matched. The inference would seem to be a very logical one, that as infants can neither repent nor believe, they must fail of regeneration till they become old enough to do both; but provision is made even for this: if the infant himself cannot renounce the devil, may not another do it for him? Such was in the third century and such is to-day the theory, but in support of which there is neither Scripture nor reason. Though our churches believe the doctrine of baptismal regeneration to have long been a fruitful source of corruption, yet it is regarded by this Episcopal "professor of systematic divinity" as "the fountain and the healing waters of a high spirituality of which the world has not seen the like since the days of Constantine." Baptismal regeneration "asserts" all the truths of Christianity and "is itself the result of them all. It rests upon them as their complement. It is the key-stone of the arch, the crowning stone of the pyramid." "In the doctrine of baptismal regeneration are to be found—for parents and children, for husbands and wives, for brothers and sisters, for mortal men and women, in all the relations of the family, the nation and the church—the root and elements of a Christianity so true and genuine, so lovely and tender, so pure and holy, that the world has not seen the like for fourteen hundred years." It is clear that the Professor has exhausted the English tongue in this description of the virtues of baptismal regeneration. The language of "the flowery kingdom" might furnish additional facilities.

This, then, is the conclusion to which we have come: first, that a Christian church in apostolic times was composed of as many persons as could meet together for the worship of God, and, secondly, that the members professed to believe in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of souls.

II.

WHAT WERE THE PERMANENT OFFICERS OF AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH?

The office of apostle was temporary. It was of such a nature that it could not be transmitted ; in other words, it was impossible for an apostle to have a successor. Says * Dr. C. A. Jacob (Episcopalian of England) :—“The apostles had no successors in their office. They stand alone.” Matthias himself was not successor to Judas. He merely filled the place from which Judas fell, thereby preserving the original number. He was not one of a succeeding class of apostles. If, therefore, such an office as that of bishop is authorized by the New Testament, it must be authorized on independent grounds. The apostolic age had a class of laborers called *evangelists*. They seemed to have preached the gospel in destitute regions. The modern evangelist, that is, a man who preaches the gospel in a region where preachers are already numerous, is an officer unknown in churches of apostolic times. “The name,” as Mr. Plumtre remarks,† “denotes a *work* rather than an order.”

The New Testament speaks of only two classes of permanent church officers ; ministers, to use the modern term, and deacons, the minister having charge of the spiritual affairs of a church, and the deacon of the temporal. The minister was sometimes called elder and sometimes bishop. The explanation is not difficult. The original word for elder was of Jewish origin ; the original word for bishop was of Greek origin. It was natural, therefore, in writing to Jews to use the word meaning *elder*, and in writing to others to use the word meaning *bishop*. Every minister was a bishop, and every minister was an elder. A few passages may be cited in proof.

* The Ecclesiastical Polity of the N. T., p. 26.

† Smith's Dic.; Art., *Evangelist*.

In Acts 20 : 17, the writer says :—“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the *elders* of the church.” The elders came, and Paul addressed them as *bishops*; for in verse 28 we have the words : “Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *bishops*,” or, as our translators have rendered the original, *overseers*. If bishops were a higher order of ministers, how could Paul address the elders as bishops? An Ephesian bishop was an elder and an Ephesian elder was a bishop. Besides if a New Testament bishop was like a modern bishop, higher in rank than other ministers, how shall we explain the fact that the Ephesian church had so many bishops? Now, many churches have but one bishop; then one church had many bishops. If bishops were different from elders, why did not Paul send for the elders *and* bishops? He sent only for elders, and when they were before him called them bishops. In the Epistle to Titus, Paul directs the young evangelist to ordain [appoint] *elders* in every city, and then, proceeding to describe the qualifications which they ought to have, calls them *bishops* : “For a bishop must be blameless.” The terms *bishop* and *elder*, then, were applied to the same officer. Conybeare and Howson (Episcopalians) say :—“We see here a proof of the early date of this epistle, in the synonymous use of “ἐπίσκοπος” [bishops] “and πρεσβύτερος” [elder]. Another English Episcopal writer, already quoted, Dr. Jacob, says that the offices of presbyters [elders] and deacons were established by the apostles themselves : “while the episcopacy, in the modern acceptation of the term, and as a distinct clerical order, does not appear in the New Testament, but was gradually introduced and extended throughout the church at a later period.”

In two passages (Phil. 1: 1; I. Tim. 1: 8.) Paul makes such allusions to bishops and deacons as to show that he regarded them as the only church officers known. Had the apostle written : “With the bishops, and the elders,

and the deacons," it must have been admitted that there were three classes of church officers, but he says only this: "With the bishops and deacons." So in I. Tim. 3: 1-12, he speaks of the qualifications of church officers, and yet speaks of only two kinds of officers. In not one place in the New Testament do we read of bishops, elders and deacons, and were a list of the qualifications of bishops and elders to be arranged in two columns, and a list of their duties also in two columns, you could write either *bishop* or *elder* over either, and neither would be inappropriate. A bishop, then, must have been the same as an elder.

An attempt has been made to show that James was bishop of Jerusalem, Timothy of Ephesus, and Titus of Crete,—bishop in the modern sense, which, of course, means that each had charge of a diocese, that each was placed over other ministers, that each had the exclusive right to ordain ministers and to confirm, all of which things are without the shadow of proof. As Mr. Plumtre says, Timothy exercised his authority as a vicar-apostolic rather than a bishop. Bengel says:—"Timothy, at Ephesus, and Titus, at Crete, were not bishops." After certain men became dissatisfied with the common ministerial office and were elevated to a rank above other ministers, and were bishops in an unscriptural sense, while all other ministers were denied the title, then some of the fathers are heard to apply the word *bishop* in the new and wide sense to James, Timothy and Titus, but we are as well able to judge what the Scriptures say concerning the matter as were the fathers. Most of the fathers showed little skill as interpreters of the word.

So few and simple were the offices of a Christian church. In this respect how unlike the apostolic age is the present! One body, which claims to be the "Church," is governed by four patriarchs, the patriarch of Constantinople having under him one hundred and

thirty-five bishops ; of Alexandria, four bishops ; of Antioch, sixteen ; of Jerusalem, thirteen ; while the Greek Church, of Russia, has sixty-five bishops. Below each bishop are many priests, and below each priest I know not how many subordinates. Another body which calls itself the Church has, as its chief officer, one who arrogates the right to govern for Almighty God all the inhabitants of the earth. Let us see how this successor of the Galilean fisherman appeared on Christmas Day of the year of grace 1847. "At an early hour," says an American writer,* "I found the church already occupied by a great crowd. A double row of *soldiers*† stretched from the entrance to the altar, around which the Pope's *guards*, in their *fantastic uniform*, looking like the knaves in a pack of cards, were stationed, while a series of seats on either side were filled by ladies, dressed in black and wearing veils. The *foreign ambassadors* were in a place appropriated to them in the tribune. * * * In due season the Pope appeared, seated in the 'sedia gestatoria,' a sort of capacious arm chair, *borne upon men's shoulders*, flanked on either side by the enormous fan of white peacock feathers. He *was carried* up the whole length of the nave, distributing his blessing with a peculiar motion of the hand upon the *kneeling* congregation. * * * His dress was of *white satin*, *richly embroidered with gold*, a costume too gaudy for daylight." Here the Pope said high mass in a building which cost \$47,000,000, and the annual expense of keeping which in repair is about \$30,000. Meek and lowly One! if this is the head what must the body be? Still another claims to be the "Church," its head being in England instead of Italy, the reigning sovereign, who, though "regenerated in baptism," may yet be notorious for impurity of life. Nearly the same want of apostolic simplicity characterizes this body as marks the Church

* Six Months in Italy, p. 146.

† The italics are ours.

of Rome,—arch-bishops, bishops, deans, arch-deacons, prebendaries and canons, and priests and deacons, and sub-deacons abounding. With some modification, this system of church offices has been reproduced in the territory covered by our republic. Here, at last, is a cardinal, swearing to persecute schismatics and heretics; here are arch-bishops, bishops, priests, preaching deacons, ruling and presiding elders.

This multiplication of offices leads to a brood of ceremonies, and in these such appeals are made to the senses of men as to endanger if not destroy spiritual life. Let us suppose ourselves to be living in the first age of Christianity. Let us suppose Paul to be a bishop. Let us suppose him to be about to ordain a deacon. Let us suppose these to be the directions which he is required to follow :—“The bishop will enter the cathedral church, vested in purple cassock, rochet, chimera, episcopal ring, zucchetto and biretta. If he do not vest in the sacristy, he will remove his vestments from the altar.

* * * On reaching the faldstool, the bishop will remove his biretta and deliver it to the deacon, who, in his turn, will deliver it to an acolyte. He will wear the zucchetto till the assumption of the mitre. The gloves will be carried on a salver.” (You will do well to remember that it is the apostle Paul to whom these directions are given.) * * *

“The bishop, on being vested with the dalmatis, sits down; and the deacon removes the episcopal ring and hands it to the sub-deacon to place on a salver held by an acolyte for that function. The gloves” (of the apostle Paul) “are then presented on a salver, and should be so arranged that the right may lie at the side of the deacon and the left at that of the sub-deacon. In putting on the gloves” (Paul’s) “the deacon assists at the right and the sub-deacon at the left.” If your spiritual nature is nauseated at the supposition which has been made, I am nevertheless under the necessity of assuring you that these very directions

are found in the *Directorium Anglicanum*, for the ordination of a modern preaching-deacon by a modern bishop. The power of Christianity as an organization is in its simplicity ; as a life in its spirituality. But when the spirituality which had distinguished the apostles and their fellow laborers began to wane, church officers began to be multiplied. The prime arch-heresy of Christendom was the attempt to model "the Christian Church" after the Jewish Church, as the Jewish commonwealth was improperly called, and as it is still called, even by such a writer as Dean Stanley. This was the heresy against which, by the inspiration of God, Paul fought with such lion-like courage, and which, checked by his mighty influence, re-appeared with destructive power after the apostles were taken to their reward. Temple, altar, priest, robe, sacrifice, many fasts and many feasts, had been destroyed by the divine hand, but men were not satisfied. Christianity was too simple to meet their wants. That viewed all men as priests ; it was taught that none should be priests but ministers. If ministers were priests, then like the Jewish priests they should not officiate in garments like those of the people. If ministers were priests there must be altars. So the communion table came to be called the altar. But what were an altar without a sacrifice ? So the bread was Christ's flesh, and the wine was Christ's blood, and therefore, whenever the Lord's Supper was observed, Christ was sacrificed. Not in the times of the apostles, therefore, but after the apostles were dead, originated that complex system of church offices, and attendant ritualism which now pervade so large a part of the Christian world. The less piety the more show of piety is the sad lesson of history. As to our own churches, we recognize but two divinely authorized offices, that of minister and that of deacon ; and we hold it to be the divine intention that all ministers should be equal in rank and rights. With this element of our church polity we are perfectly satisfied because we believe it to be perfectly scriptural.

III.

WHAT WERE THE POWERS OF AN APOSTOLIC CHURCH?

Had such a church any power at all, and, if it had, how much?

From the premises already laid down it would follow, even if the Scriptures were silent concerning the matter, that every church had the exclusive management of its own affairs. If there was no provincial church, embracing within its fold particular churches, no bishop in the broader sense of that word, no church session, no General Assembly, no presiding elder and no General Conference, how would it be possible for a church to be amenable to any person or persons external to itself? Democratic or popular power, then, not aristocratic, not monarchical, must have been the characteristic of Christianity in the first century.

But we are not without the direct testimony of Scripture; yet, before citing it, let us glance at the great proof text of Romanists in support of the monarchical theory: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16: 18, 19). If these words are correctly interpreted by Romanists, the popular form of church government is not authorized by Christianity; the monarchical is the only form allowed. Let it be admitted at once that by the words "upon this rock," our Lord means Peter himself, which every Protestant scholar ought to admit. But (*a.*) the other apostles as well as Peter are represented as being the foundation of the church (Eph. 2: 20; Rev. 21: 14); (*b.*) the powers conferred upon Peter were soon, even if not then, conferred upon the other apostles (John 20: 23), and, indeed, upon an entire church (Matt. 18: 18); (*c.*) Peter

himself never assumed official authority over his fellow apostles; (*d*) Paul so conducted toward Peter as to show that he recognized in him no superiority of rank (Gal. 2: 11-14); (*e*.) on one important occasion James towers quite above Peter in perception and influence (Acts 15). The words of our Lord are therefore no support to the monarchical form of church government. But the Roman Catholic translation of Heb. 13: 7, says, "Remember your *prelates* who have spoken the word of God to you;" and of 13: 17, "Obey your *prelates* and be subject to them." Dogmatics have often run down and trampled over exegesis. One touch of the independent translator demolishes the fabric of monarchy as the touch of the finger has made the long buried corpse fall into a shapeless heap of ashes. "Remember those who *were* your *leaders*" (now dead); "Obey them who *are* your *leaders*" (now living).

On the other hand, let it be noticed with what power Jesus Christ has invested the people. After telling your brother's fault to him alone and to witnesses, "tell it unto the church, but, if he neglect to hear the church," appeal to the presbytery? to the quarterly conference? to the bishop? "let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Whatsoever ye,"—the particular church of which the offender is a member—"shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18: 15-17). The exercise of popular power in discipline is enjoined also by the apostle Paul (I. Cor., 4, 5, 13). The early departure from the apostolic law of exclusion, continued to the present day, is well known. In the larger part of Christendom the people have no power to exclude as they have no power to admit. Admission or exclusion by pope, bishop or rector, by association, conference or council, is a usurpation of the rights of the people. By the "Discipline" of the Methodist Episcopal Church a member accused of immoral conduct must be tried, not

by the particular church of which he is a member, but by a committee of not less than five, not one of whom is necessarily a member of that church, and, if found guilty, may be expelled by the preacher in charge.* An attempt to introduce into Baptist Church polity such monarchical power in discipline would fire our ministers and churches from Maine to California.

An apostolic church had power to elect officers and appoint delegates. Even an apostle was chosen by the people (Acts 1 : 15, 23, 26), and the choice was made at the suggestion of Peter. The seven deacons were chosen not by the apostles but by "the multitude of the disciples" (Acts 6: 3). The brother who was wanted to travel with Paul was chosen by "the churches" (II. Cor., 8 : 19). As a messenger and deacon, and even an apostle, were chosen by the people, it is probable that the act of Paul and Barnabas in appointing "elders in every city" (Acts 14: 23) of Asia Minor was suggestive and coöperative, the churches themselves expressing their approbation of the men whose names were proposed. Viewed as exclusively apostolic, allowing the churches no voice whatever, the act would have been quite out of harmony with the spirit and acts of the apostles in their relation to other churches. The same may be said of the direction given to Titus to appoint elders in every city (Titus 1 : 5). "As long as I live," said Wesley, "the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders among Methodists."† Very different was the spirit of the apostles. The theory that every church in the wide world, in all ages, should allow some person or persons to furnish it with a pastor instead of choosing a pastor for itself, is not the fruit of true biblical exegesis, but is only a logical deduction from the unscriptural notion of organic church unity. When the Baptists shall admit that notion and the related idea of centralized power, they will allow bishops to assign them pastors.

* Discipline, 336, 337, p. 133.

† Dr. Davidson's Eccles. Pol., p. 413.

But are all Baptists consistent with their cherished notion of independence? Imitating the Congregationalists of colonial times, a large number of our churches in New England do not have exclusive power to choose their own pastors. If Methodist churches allow other men to choose their pastors, let it be said to their praise that they have not entrusted that work, in whole or in part, to men of the world. We, on the contrary, have surrendered exclusive control of our pulpits by allowing incorporate societies to consist, in part, of persons who are not members of a church, which is contrary to the spirit and, I had almost said, to the letter, of the New Testament. The written constitution of some of these societies is so broad that the infidel, the profane, the intemperate, the card player and the licentious may become, and do become, members; and, having both money and gift of speech, become the chief managers of the services of the Lord's house. It is admitted that such cases are exceptions; but, however excellent the character of the men, Christianity requires that the pulpit, the meeting-house, the parsonage and the finances should be under the exclusive control of the church. In the City of Philadelphia, where are fifty Baptist churches, and, indeed, in the larger part of the United States, the New England system is unknown. Dr. Wayland, Dr. Benedict and Dr. Jackson felt that in this respect we had made a mistake, and probably all others who have given thought to the subject are of the same opinion.

Standing committees, in the judgment of some, are inconsistent with our popular form of government, but that depends on the purpose for which such committees stand and how long they stand. The church sessions of a Presbyterian church, consisting of the pastor and ruling elders, is a judicatory for the exercise of government and discipline.* It has power to receive members and power to exclude.† These elders hold office through life. Now,

* The Form of Government, Book I., chap. V.

† Book I., chap. IX., 7.

if the standing committee of a Baptist church should take even the first step in a process of discipline, and if there should be no annual election, by which one or more may go out of office and their places be filled by others, such a committee would be essentially like the church sessions of a Presbyterian church. The excellence of the men would be nothing to the point. Such a committee would not be in harmony with the Baptist idea of inspired teaching relative to church government. If it be said that such a committee acts merely as the representative of the church, it may be replied that that is precisely what the Presbyterian Book of Discipline says in defence of the church session. No Baptist church which allows its standing committee to stand year after year, for an indefinite period, without re-election, can defend its form of government against the Presbyterian form.*

The power of the people has been lost, however, chiefly through the rise of episcopacy. How, within one hundred years after the apostles, the original oneness of bishop and elder began to disappear, how *bishop* came to be applied to a small class of ministers while other ministers continued to be called *elders*, how the bishops grew in ambition, how they dared to call themselves the successors of the apostles, and to claim the name of priest in imitation of the ancient Jewish priest, and to avow the possession of such special divine aid as no others on earth had or could have; how they arrogated the exclusive right to ordain, and how, in laying on hands in ordination, they claimed that the Holy Ghost was given, and would not be given through any other fingers than their own; how diocesan power became metropolitan

* A very few cases are known in which a Baptist church has no annual election of clerk, treasurer, standing committee, or Sunday school officers and teachers. *The only rotation in office is that of pastor.* There are also cases in which the moneys raised for benevolent objects are never reported to the church and never entered upon the Church Record Book. Some Baptist churches seem to act upon the principle that the smaller the number of members who meet to do the business the better. These obvious violations of the requirements of the popular form of church government are doubtless the result of mere thoughtlessness.

power, and metropolitan power patriarchal power, and patriarchal power papal power,—how all this happened need not be related. Nor need it be detailed how bishops deposed bishops, how councils came into vogue, and, becoming the tools of the higher clergy, had the arrogance to demand of the churches the acceptance of creeds which they had hammered out upon their own anvils; how bishops eat up the property of “the Church” and made themselves fat; how, in view of their quarrels and lust, an ancient idolater said: “Make me a bishop, and I will surely be a Christian.” *

How this hoary-headed monarchy still prevails; how, though here and there its power has been weakened, it still wields its sceptre over the larger part of Christendom; how, in the Roman form of development, it has brought the hottest damnation upon itself by that quintessence of all arrogance,—infallibility,—how in free England and freer America millions of human souls are ground into the dust by being denied that right “of private judgment in matters of religion in opposition to that of authority,” which Archbishop Spalding says † “is the fatal source of all this mischief,”—American infidelity and indifference; how the doctrines of apostolic succession, Episcopal ordination, and baptismal regeneration, aid in keeping priestly power in the hands of the few, and shutting the mouths of the people as to the question who may be associated with them in church-membership,—these things, also, need not be related in detail. Christians of apostolic times acknowledged “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords,” and, in religious affairs, modern Baptists, by the grace of God, will not very soon be found ready to acknowledge any other.

Such is the church polity of the New Testament; such is an apostolic church. If, in the mind of any hearer,

* Coleman's Manual, p. 84.

† Miscellanea, I. 382.

the conviction has been awakened that the discussion has been conducted with too much sharpness, it may be said that had time permitted me to bring before you a thousandth part of the error and worldliness which have arisen from the introduction of an unscriptural polity, and had propriety permitted me to uncover the depths of immorality into which bishops, priests, and people, fell before John had been in his grave three hundred years, the hearer would have blamed the speaker for undue tenderness. No man who has even a partial knowledge of the facts as they are revealed in the writings of the fathers, and no man who brings before his mind the fact that even to-day nearly the entire Christian world, Catholic and Protestant, is committed to the error that others than believers in Christ may be and ought to be members of "the Church,"—no man who knows the facts, finds it easy to speak with "a temperance that shall give it smoothness." If, then, it were possible for the Baptists of this country to become so insane as to think of dissolving their twenty thousand little, independent, Christian republics, so wonderfully united in polity, doctrine, and love, into what other people could they permit themselves to be absorbed, without committing suicide? Is there another people in the world which has yet become so leavened with our principles that we could enter into organic oneness with it without surrendering the principles which we believe to be taught in the word of God? Not one in the wide world. We hope, then, with the Lord's help, to be in the future what we have been hitherto,—the representatives of apostolic Christianity. We shall continue to insist upon apostolic baptism and shall keep baptism where almost the entire Christian world has kept it eighteen hundred years,—before the Supper; and even if all other denominations shall sacrifice their long cherished principle, putting the Supper in unnatural and unscriptural precedence, and doing it for the purpose of making a logical defence against us,—even then, with the help which

comes from above, we shall continue to bear aloft, alone, the apostolic banner:—FAITH ; BAPTISM ; THE SUPPER.

But let all be done without severity toward persons. Let us be strict in polity, respectful and loving in spirit. Error needs the aid of prejudice and asperity ; truth can win without either. Let us not mistake sectarian zeal for love of God's word. Let us not forget that in the very bodies whose errors we combat are many true children of God, toward whom—as individuals—we should cherish the spirit of Christian love. With these we should delight to hold Christian fellowship, and when the earthly conflict of opinions is ended, it will be sweet to meet them before our Father's throne.



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